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Aboriginal Language Indicators for Métis Children Under the Age of Six in Canada

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Statistics Canada
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Symbols

The following standard symbols are used in Statistics Canada publications:

.	not available for any reference period
..	not available for a specific reference period
...	not applicable
0	true zero or a value rounded to zero
0s	value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded
p	preliminary
r	revised
x	suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*
E	use with caution
F	too unreliable to be published

Background

The Métis people of Canada are one of the three Aboriginal groups recognized by the Canadian Constitution. They have traditionally spoken many First Nations languages, European languages, and their own distinctive language, Michif (Dorion and Préfontaine, 2001). Language is important for sharing cultural knowledge across the generations - it is closely linked to family, community and the land (Norris, 2007).

As with other Aboriginal peoples in Canada, the Métis are facing the risk of Aboriginal language loss (Norris, 2007). According to the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the transmission of Aboriginal languages across the generations was greatly disrupted by residential schools in Canada, where Aboriginal language use was prohibited. Today, English and French are often the only languages offered at school for most Aboriginal children (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The revitalization of Aboriginal languages in Canada has been identified by the Royal Commission as a key component for building both healthy individuals and healthy communities.

This fact sheet examines Aboriginal language knowledge among the youngest generation of Métis children in Canada, those under the age of six. It provides broad indicators of young Métis children's experiences with Aboriginal languages at home and in the community. Findings are based primarily on data from the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey, with some additional background information from the 2006 Census.

Young Métis children in Canada

According to the 2006 Census of Population, there are approximately 35,000 Métis children under the age of six in Canada, representing almost 10% of the overall Métis population. Most young Métis children (89%) are growing up in the western provinces and Ontario. In Manitoba, Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories, where the Métis population makes up a substantial share of the overall population, young Métis children represent almost one in 10 of all young children in the region.

Speaking and understanding Aboriginal languages

The Aboriginal Children's Survey provides information on children's Aboriginal language knowledge—that is, the ability to express their needs in an Aboriginal language or to understand an Aboriginal language when someone speaks it to them.

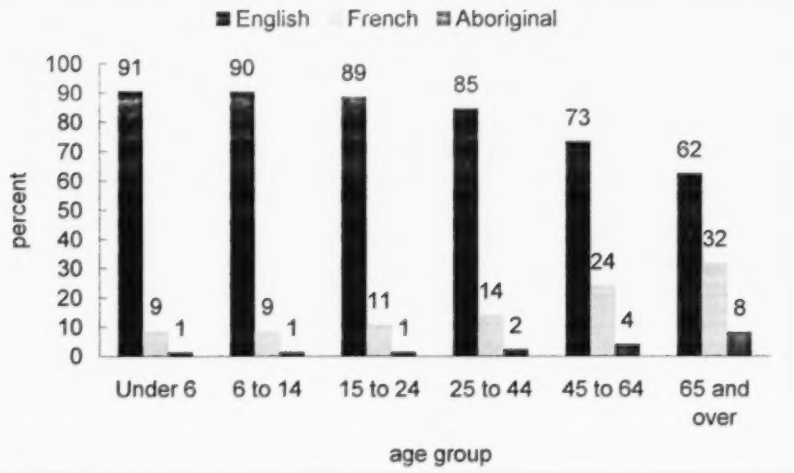
- In Canada, only a small percentage of young Métis children have Aboriginal language knowledge. Among Métis children generally considered to be of speaking age (2 to 5 years old), 3% are able to express their needs in an Aboriginal language and 7% are able to understand an Aboriginal language.

- Aboriginal language knowledge differs by region of the country. In Saskatchewan, where 15% of young Métis children live, these children are more likely to acquire an Aboriginal language compared to their counterparts in most other regions. About 8% of Métis children in Saskatchewan are able to speak an Aboriginal language and 16% are able to understand an Aboriginal language. Also, while only 1% of young Métis children live in the Northwest Territories, this region has the highest percentage of children who can understand an Aboriginal language (28%).

- Aboriginal languages spoken most widely by young Métis children in Canada are Cree and Dene. Among Aboriginal languages understood by young Métis children, the most commonly reported are Cree, Dene, Ojibwe and Michif. About 4% of young Métis children are able to understand Cree while about 1% or less can understand each of the Dene, Ojibwe and Michif languages.

- Almost all Métis children who are learning an Aboriginal language are also learning English or French. Among young Métis speakers of an Aboriginal language, 96% can also speak English or French. Overall, 93% of young Metis children can express their needs in English and 13% can express their needs in French. About 6% of young Métis children can speak both English and French.

Chart 1
Percentage of the Métis population whose mother tongue is English, French or an Aboriginal language, by age group, Canada, 2006



Note(s):
'Mother tongue' is the language first learned in childhood and still understood. Percentages for each age group may add up to more than 100% since an individual may have more than one mother tongue.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2006.

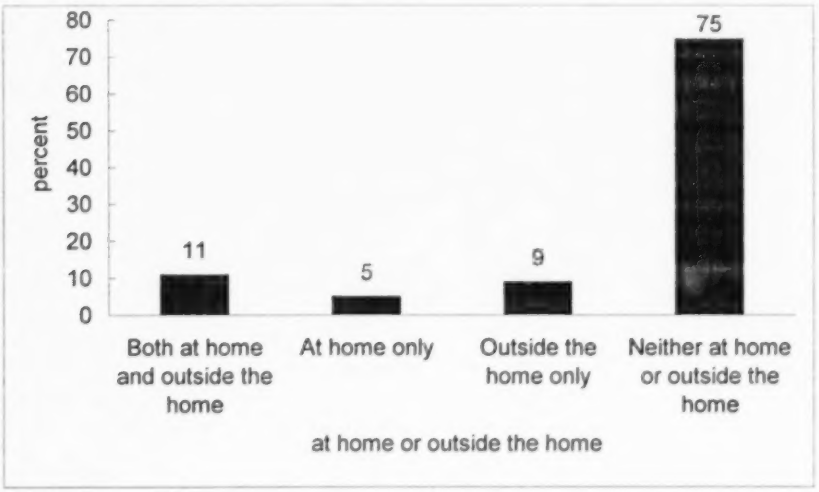
- According to the 2006 Census of Population, about 1% of young Métis children are learning an Aboriginal language as their first language or mother tongue, with the majority learning English (91%) or French (9%) as their first language. This mother tongue profile for young Métis children is similar to that of Métis children aged 6 to 14 as well as for youth and young adults aged 15 to 24 (see Chart 1). Compared to Métis adults aged 45 and over, there has been a decline for younger generations both in the learning of an Aboriginal language and in the learning of French as the mother tongue.

Exposure to Aboriginal languages at home and in the community

The Aboriginal Children's Survey measured Aboriginal language exposure in a variety of settings.

- In the home, about 16% of young Métis children are being exposed to an Aboriginal language on a regular basis, either daily (7%), weekly (6%) or monthly (4%). A total of 20% of young Métis children have regular exposure (daily, weekly or monthly) to an Aboriginal language outside the home, either in the homes of others or in the community where they live. For 11% of children, this exposure is experienced both at home and outside the home (see Chart 2).

Chart 2
Percentage of Métis children under the age of six with regular exposure to an Aboriginal language, at home or outside the home, 2006

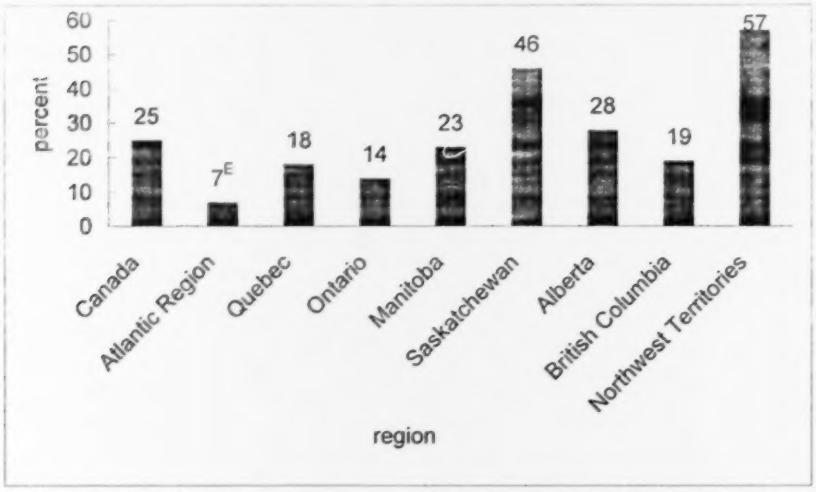


Note(s):
'Regular exposure' includes daily, weekly or monthly exposure to an Aboriginal language. 'Outside the home' includes 'in the homes of others' and/or 'in the community' where they currently live.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- Among young Métis children who are exposed to an Aboriginal language on a regular basis both at home and outside the home, about two in 10 (18%) are able to speak an Aboriginal language and about four in 10 (42%) have the ability to understand that language. Young children who are exposed to an Aboriginal language both at home and in outside the home are about twice as likely to understand an Aboriginal language compared to children who are only exposed at home. They are about four times as likely to understand an Aboriginal language when compared to those who are exposed to an Aboriginal language only outside the home.

- Aboriginal language exposure differs by region of the country (see Chart 3). Almost six in 10 young Métis children in the Northwest Territories (57%) and close to half of young Métis children in Saskatchewan (46%) are exposed to an Aboriginal language on a regular basis, either in their homes, in the homes of others or in the community. For Alberta (28%) and Manitoba (23%), about one in four Métis children are regularly exposed to an Aboriginal language at home or in settings outside the home.

Chart 3
Percentage of Métis children under the age of six with regular exposure to an Aboriginal language, at home or outside the home, by region, 2006



Note(s):
'Regular exposure' includes daily, weekly or monthly exposure to an Aboriginal language, either in the child's home or outside the home. 'Outside the home' refers to 'in the homes of others' and/or 'in the community' where they currently live. Data for Yukon and Nunavut are suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the *Statistics Act*.
Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

- Across Canada, almost half (48%) of Métis children under the age of six are in a regular child care arrangement. This refers to the care of a child, on a consistent basis, by someone other than a parent, including daycare, nursery or preschool, Head Start and care by a relative or other caregiver. Looking at the main child care arrangement of young Métis children, where the child spends the most time, about 6% are in child care settings where an Aboriginal language is used.

- Another source of Aboriginal language exposure is the media. A total of 14% of young Métis children across Canada are regularly exposed (daily, weekly or monthly) to Aboriginal languages through media such as TV, DVDs, radio or books.

Aboriginal language exposure and family characteristics

- Just over a third of Métis children under the age of six are living exclusively with Aboriginal parents, either with a lone Aboriginal parent (24%) or two Aboriginal parents (13%). About half (49%) of young Métis children are living with one Aboriginal parent and one non-Aboriginal parent. About 11% are living with non-Aboriginal parents only—7% with a lone non-Aboriginal parent and 4% with two non-Aboriginal parents.

- Among young Métis children growing up in households with two Aboriginal parents or a lone Aboriginal parent, about 28% are being exposed to an Aboriginal language on a regular basis at home. The likelihood of regular exposure at home is much less, about 10%, where children live with one Aboriginal parent and one non-Aboriginal parent. For children living with a lone non-Aboriginal parent, the likelihood of regular exposure to an Aboriginal language at home was also about 10%.

- About 6% of Métis children under the age of six have at least one parent whose first language is an Aboriginal language. Among these children, 77% are exposed to an Aboriginal language in their homes on a regular basis. Where the first language of the parent is not an Aboriginal language, 13% of children are being exposed to an Aboriginal language regularly at home.

- About 8% of young Métis children are living with their grandparents. Métis children living in homes where grandparents are present are more likely to be exposed to an Aboriginal language at home on a regular basis compared to children who do not live with grandparents (27% compared to 15%). Data from the 2006 Census show that older Métis are more likely to speak an Aboriginal language.

Hopes and expectations of parents

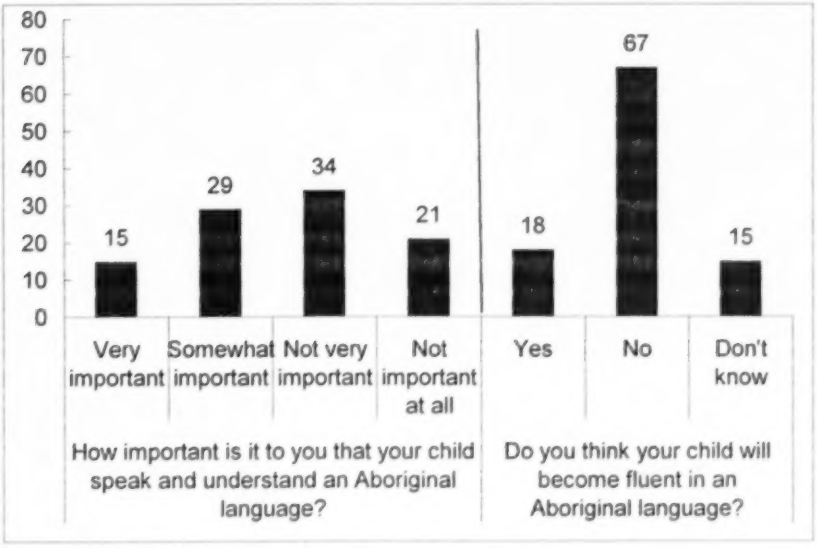
In the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey, parents were asked how important it was to them that their child speaks and understands an Aboriginal language and if they thought their child would become fluent in an Aboriginal language.

- About 44% of young Métis children have parents who feel that it is very or somewhat important for their child to speak and understand an Aboriginal language (see Chart 4).

- For about one in five (18%) Métis children, parents believe that their child will become fluent in an Aboriginal language. Expectations of fluency rise to about 40% for children who are exposed to an Aboriginal language on a regular basis, either at home or outside the home.

The hopes and expectations of parents could point to the importance of resources and opportunities for young Métis children to learn Aboriginal languages in a variety of settings, at home and in the broader community.

Chart 4
Percentage of Métis children under the age of six whose parent thought it was important that their child speak and understand an Aboriginal language or thought their child would become fluent in an Aboriginal language, 2006



Source(s): Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Children's Survey, 2006.

What you should know about this fact sheet

The Aboriginal Children's Survey was developed by Statistics Canada and Aboriginal advisors from across the country and was conducted jointly with Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The survey took place between October 2006 and March 2007. Parents or guardians of approximately 10,500 Aboriginal children under six years of age, including almost 4,000 Métis children, provided information through a combination of personal and telephone interviews. The overall response rate for the survey was 81.1%.

For this survey, the parent or guardian responded on behalf of the child. For the majority of Métis children (93%), this person was the birth mother or father. Grandparents, foster parents and adoptive parents made up the majority of the remaining parents or guardians who responded to the survey for Métis children.

In this fact sheet, 'Métis children' include those whose parents or guardians identified them as Métis on the Aboriginal Children's Survey in response to the question: 'Is (child) an Aboriginal person, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuk?' Métis children include those who were identified as Métis only and those identified as Métis in combination with another Aboriginal group, either North American Indian (First Nations) or Inuit.

Data on mother tongue are only available for the parent or guardian who responded to the survey but not for their spouse/partner nor for their child.

For more detailed information on the survey, please consult the *Aboriginal Children's Survey 2006 Concepts and Methods Guide* (Statistics Canada catalogue number 89-634).

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